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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002346

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SUBJECT: NGO REGISTRY SEEKS STABILITY; STATE MINISTRY ROLE
IN CONSTITUTION DEVELOPMENT MARGINAL

Classified By: A/Polcouns Henry S. Ensher.
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. The recent transfer of the NGO Registry Office to the State Ministry of Civil Society Affairs, which has a Sadrist Minister, has raised concerns about the Ministry's role and the potential misuse of registry data for political purposes. Both the Deputy Prime Minister and the new head of the State Minister for Civil Society Affairs assured EmbOffs that the NGO community would be allowed to operate freely in Iraq. NGOs in Iraq will need to play a role in public awareness during the constitution-drafting process, but this small ministry appears ill equipped to facilitate that process. END SUMMARY.

NEW HOME AND SUPERVISOR FOR THE NGO REGISTRY OFFICE

2. (C/NF) On May 29, Dr. Bassim al-Rubaie, the newly designated head of the NGO Registry Office, told PolOff and IRMO Consultant that the Council of Ministers and the State Minister for Civil Society Affairs dismissed the previous office head, Dawod Pasha, due to his reported Ba'athist affiliations as well as his prior employment as a police officer in the Interior Ministry. At about the same time, the Council of Ministers selected Dr. Al-Rubaie, an attorney with prior experience with NGOs, as the new head of the NGO Registry Office. Al-Rubaie explained that the office, which had previously resided in the Planning Ministry, had finally moved to the State Ministry for Civil Society Affairs.

3. (C/NF) Al-Rubaie explained that his office would initially provide training to NGOs in two specific areas: how to organize themselves as NGO's, and how to obtain both government and non-government funding. He hopes this could be accomplished through provincial NGO centers he plans to establish. He also described a project to coordinate with "Iraqi business centers" to match potential donors from the business community with an NGO that can perform the desired task. This concept, however, is still in the developmental stage. Eventually, he hopes that the NGO community can even augment the staff at the Baghdad-based NGO Registry Office.

NEW STATE MINISTER AND PLANS FOR STATE/NGO
RELATIONSHIP

4. (C/NF) During a meeting the previous week, the new State Minister for Civil Society Affairs, Ala'a Habib Khadim, told EmbOffs that the move by the Registry Office back to his Ministry would correct the mistakes made by the previous government in handling the registry. He explained that the registry would serve as the "core" of his ministry's work and, logically, belongs there. Khadim said he anticipated logistics problems with the transfer, and hopes the U.S. will be able to assist him financially and technically. EmbOffs noted the separation between the NGO community and government in democratic countries, with the government role, if necessary, focused on advocacy and support and not/not control of NGO activities. While Khadim acknowledged this distinction, he was still concerned over illegitimate NGOs used as insurgent fronts as well as fraudulent NGOs bilking funds from unwitting donors. He also spoke of required monthly activity reports by NGOs as a means of control by his state ministry. EmbOffs expressed concern about this idea.

5. (C/NF) Khadim, a Sadrist, looks forward to working with the NGO community with specific goals to provide funding, training, and coordination with NGOs. To accomplish these goals, he intends to open a Baghdad-based as well as regional NGO training centers

operated by his state ministry. Khadim also intends to replace CPA Order 45 of that was promulgated to provide initial legal guidelines and requirements for emerging NGO work in Iraq. While Order 45 served its intended purpose, he explained, its time has passed and, similar to the TAL, it needs to be replaced with something that reflects the new Iraq. EmbOffs offered to explore the possibility of arranging technical assistance and meetings with prominent international NGOs for Khadim and his small staff, an offer he warmly embraced.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND NGO PROTECTION FROM
INTRUSION

16. (C/NF) On May 30, Dawood Pasha, the departing head of the NGO Registry Office, told Deputy Prime Minister Abd al Mutlak al Jabhuri and EmbOffs that he was concerned over the apparent intrusion the State Ministry has initiated against the NGO Registry Office. Specifically, Pasha alleged that, in coordination with the Khadim, the Sadr Bureau and Da'wa sent members to the NGO Registry Office for no apparent function other than to collect information on NGOs. (Note: On May 30, EmbOff discussed these allegations with Khadim, which he flatly denied. End note.) Pasha was also concerned that the actual NGO registry delivered to the Sadr Bureau.

17. (C/NF) DPM Jaburi stated that the NGO Registry Office needed to remain apolitical, without party affiliation, and beyond any interference by other ministries. Regarding the database, he promised to bring this issue to the attention of Prime Minister Jafari and initiate an investigation to determine if any loss of information actually occurred and to assess the security risk. As a general measure to safeguard the activities of the NGO Registry Office, he said he would ask the PM's office to instruct the other ministers not to interfere with the activities of that office.

NGO OFFICE SHORTFALLS AND U.S. SUPPORT

18. (C/NF) Comment: We have seen positive signs for providing support and advocacy for the NGO community. However, when faced with difficult issues, the new authorities default to more government control. The NGO Registry Office and the State Minister could both benefit from technical support and exposure to successes in the international community, both of which can be coordinated by post.

19. (C/NF) (continued) While the State Ministry leadership is new and seeks to define its role in government and civil society affairs, its value in the constitution development process appears marginal. National Assembly members have commented to PolOff that they doubt the State Ministry could be a major contributor in the process. The primary civil society outreach effort is coming from the local NGO community on its own initiative (a positive sign) as well as the international NGO community. End comment.

110. (U) REO HILLAH, REO BASRAH, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.

Jeffrey